

CHAPTER XVI

ENDEAVOURS TO IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL STANDARD

(1) EUGENICS

EUGENICS, which teaches that the physical and mental characteristics of children are determined by the predisposition of the parents, is gradually leading to the demand that persons of defective predisposition should either not marry, or should at least practise birth-control. In the words of the prophet Ezekiel, the children's teeth should not be set on edge because the fathers ate sour grapes. Till the nineteenth century in the arranging of Jewish marriages preference was given to scholars versed in Hebrew literature and tradition, it being the ambition of parents to marry their daughter to a scholar, or their son to the daughter of a scholar. Salomon Maimon relates in his autobiography that in the eighteenth century in Poland "the rich traders, farmers, and artisans did all they could to obtain a good Talmudist for son-in-law even if he was deformed or ailing". As far back as Babylon the Talmud taught: "Turn all that thou hast into money and procure in marriage for thy son the daughter of a scholar, and for thy daughter a scholar". Whether the aim was to secure a happy marriage and a good

social position,
or whether there was the conscious idea of
producing able
children, the preference given to the families
of scholars
resulted in a systematic selection leading
towards intellec-
tual development. While at present large
families are only
found among the poor, it was formerly the
privilege of
rich Jews to bring up many children, those
of the poor
dying in large numbers in the unhygienic
conditions of the
ghetto. Thus the preference in marriage
given to scholars